DIGITAL
ETHICS

Digital Ethics by Futurist Gerd Leonhard

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Futurist Gerd Leonhard's latest findings from the intersection of humanity and technology, focusing on Digital Ethics i.e. the ethics of exponential technological change and related Technology/Humanity topics

Introduction

Welcome to the eighth issue of our Digital Ethics Newsletter, a highly curated weekly collection of topics and opinions on [Digital Ethics](#), and part of our continuing [#TechVsHuman](#) conversation. This newsletter is co-created by Futures Agency Curator [Peter Van](#).

This week's news was somewhat dominated by Facebook's new vision document, putting forth privacy as their number one priority. We've curated a selection of the reactions from around the globe - some complimentary, some not - under the 'Facebook' heading below.

We were also impressed by the demo of HoloLens2, blurring the vision of who and what we really are, a common theme throughout this week's edition.

I've also included some great documents and white-papers that also deserve your attention.

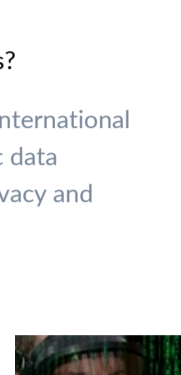
Happy reading,

Gerd.

Need more context to understand our weekly futurist updates? Try Gerd's best-selling book ["Technology vs Humanity"](#), now available in 11 languages.

Highlights

Robots as new social actors: will this change who/what we are?

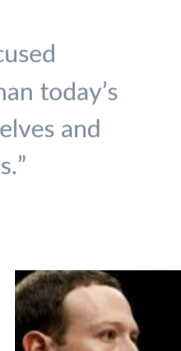
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A set of experiments with humans and robots indicates that robots (or AI in general) can influence human behaviour, in both a positive and negative sense. Robots are not merely human-made objects, but a new class of social actors.

The fact that AI might meaningfully reduce our ability to work together is extremely concerning... what I call the "social suite" a crucial set of capacities we have evolved over hundreds of thousands of years, including love, friendship, cooperation, and teaching."

Societal Impact

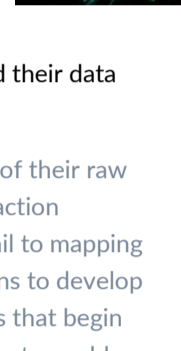
AI should lead towards a redefinition of responsible business (says Dov Seidman)

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Panelists at the [New Work Summit](#) in late February this year discussed the opportunities and risks that are emerging as the use of artificial intelligence accelerates.

What does it mean to be human in the age of intelligent machines... The business of business is now society taking responsibility in this context as incapable, and how you take responsibility is now a new source of competitive advantage. I believe that we are in a profound moral moment.

Combining Human And Artificial Intelligence: do humans need to adapt?

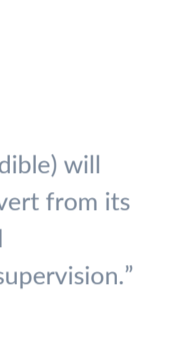
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Businesses are increasingly realising that their employees need to work alongside artificial intelligence to deliver the best results. But who adapts to who?

"AI (Artificial Intelligence) and HI (Human Intelligence) work well together, so long as human workers undergo the correct training to collaborate with intelligent systems."

Governance

China to lead AI ethics: some skepticism required

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China wants to lead the development of ethical standards for AI and bring Chinese wisdom to international AI ethics research. Undoubtedly, a ton of skepticism is needed here. But if not China, who would you trust for setting up digital ethics?

"Still, China's use of AI in surveillance has met with plenty of international criticism. Reports of using AI to assist surveillance and genetic data collection in the Western region of Xinjiang have triggered privacy and human rights concerns."

Should we be treating algorithms the same way we treat hazardous chemicals?

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At first, algorithms and hazardous chemicals seem to have little in common. One is created out of computer code, and exists in cyberspace; the other is made up of atoms and molecules, and lives in the physical realm. However, there are surprising similarities in how the risks associated with the development and use of algorithms might be assessed.

"If we're serious about ensuring the safe and beneficial development and use of algorithms, we need to learn how to treat them with the same rigour and respect that we do the chemicals that our lives depend on."

The Facebook case study on digital ethics

A Privacy-Focused Vision for Social Networking | Facebook

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Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg has written a voluminous 3200 word treatise, claiming privacy is now his highest priority.

"I think about the future of the internet. I believe a privacy-focused communications platform will become even more important than today's open platforms. Privacy gives people the freedom to be themselves and connect more naturally, which is why we built social networks."

Facebook's Pivot to Privacy Is Missing Something Crucial

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WIRED asks the most important question: does this change the business model of Facebook?

"Ultimately, Zuckerberg doesn't address the biggest trade-off: Are these changes compatible with Facebook's fundamental business model, which relies on a steady supply of user data? If these changes are truly implemented, there will be a substantial business cost to bear. Until he fully answers that, Zuckerberg's vision of privacy will be incomplete."

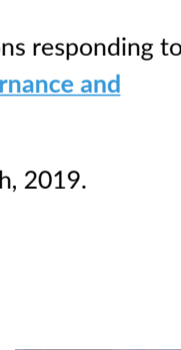
The real reason why Facebook and Google won't change

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The corporate surveillance business model is indeed flawed, at least from a digital ethics perspective: Facebook, Google, and others need to apply economies of scope to exponentially expand their data sources and grow their advertising revenues.

"Surveillance capitalists depend on the continuous expansion of their raw material (behavioural data) to drive revenue growth. This extraction imperative explains why Google expanded from search to email to mapping to trying to build entire cities. It's why Amazon invested millions to develop the Echo and Alexa. It's why there's a proliferation of products that begin with the word smart, virtually all of which are simply interfaces to enable the unobstructed flow of behavioural data that previously wasn't available, harvested from your kitchen to your bedroom."

Zuckerberg's Privacy Contradictions

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David Kirkpatrick, author of [The Facebook Effect \(2011\)](#), has probably one of the more balanced opinions on Zuckerberg's vision:

"There are historic elements to the statement, and they mostly have to do not with privacy per se, but with Zuckerberg's evolving attitude towards governments. He is asserting ever more autonomy and authority to act unilaterally, despite whatever governments may want."

Facebook is no longer 'social' anything - it's an AI-platform that needs to be regulated (updated)

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And my own futurist's look forward in my post from Jan 2018:

"No matter what Zuck's good intentions (which I think are credible) will actually amount to, I don't think Facebook will significantly divert from its current path of ruthlessly monetizing human relationships and fundamentally changing our societies without regulation and supervision."



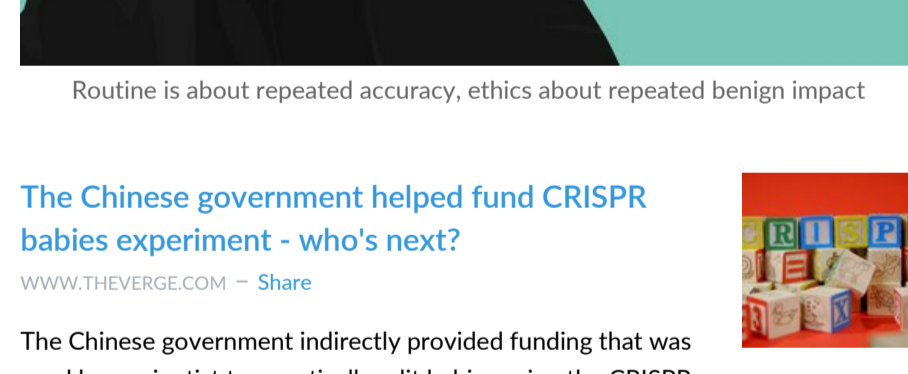
A film by my team on the future of technology and humanity

And yes, I did #DeleteFacebook myself on 23 March 2018.

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Why? For me, the Cambridge Analytica debacle was the straw that broke the camel's back.

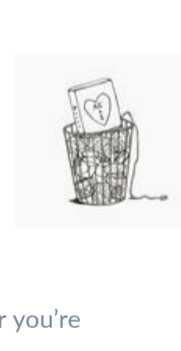
"Facebook can no longer be trusted to do the right thing with my content and my data; and without a doubt a lot more negligence and all kinds of unethical behaviour on their end is going to emerge."



Gerd on Privacy, Big Data and Facebook at SwissNext event April 2012

Challenges

Editing the human genome: do the risks outweigh the rewards? (via WEF)

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From a risk governance perspective, the great leap forward in gene-editing technology requires a dialogue between scientists, governments and the public.

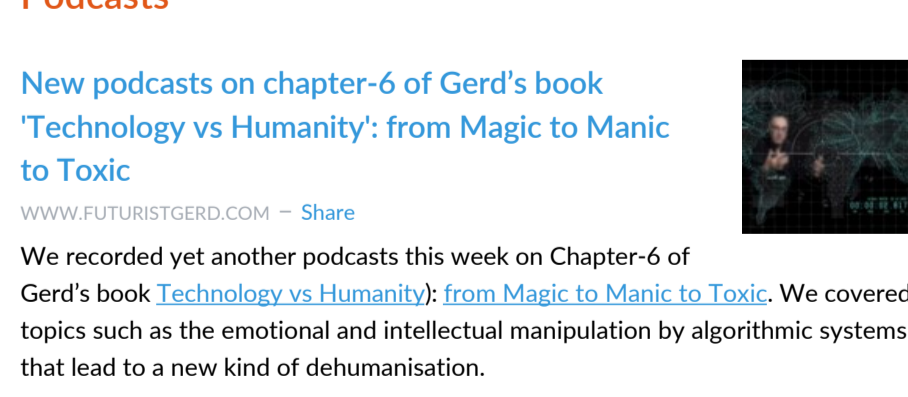
"Nobody disagrees that we should not go beyond research in the laboratory until we have proper understanding of the consequences."

Technologies

Microsoft HoloLens 2: creating a blurred vision of who/what we are?

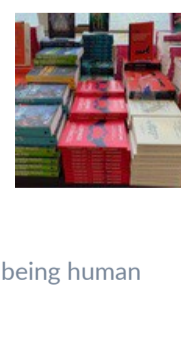
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Microsoft launched HoloLens2 at the latest [Mobile World Congress](#). You can find the full video [here](#). In the fragment below, the line between real and virtual is blurring:



Microsoft Keynote HoloLens 2 at Mobile World Congress (MWC) 2019

Magic Leap CEO is dead serious about creating the Matrix - he calls it 'Magicverse'

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Rony Abowitz, CEO of Magic Leap, talks about the Magicverse like it's a real thing. The Magicverse is his vision for a positive version of The Matrix, the Metaverse, the Oasis, and many other science fiction utopias and dystopias that depict the future of cyberspace.

"It is important to lay an ethical foundation for this future now. It will include Presence, Persistence, Scale, Awareness, Interactivity, Respect, and Sentience...so that technology - as envisioned in science fiction that shows the rise of artificial intelligence robots - will not become our master in the future."



From Magicverse to Toxicverse?

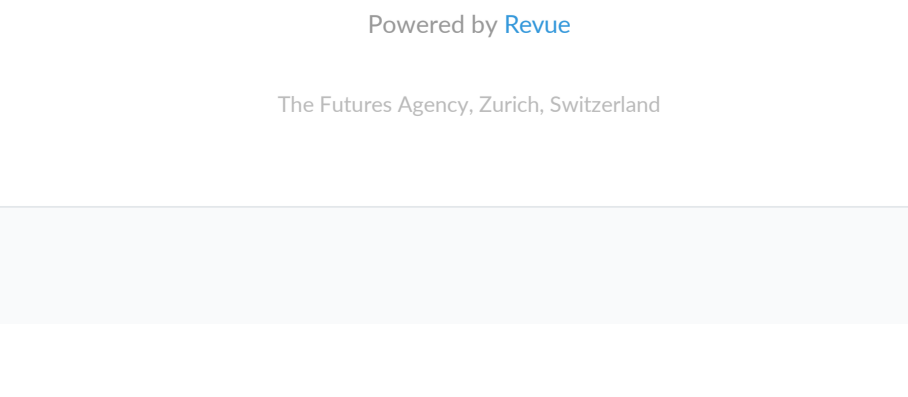
Industries

Deloitte calls for a global ethical framework for AI

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Also Deloitte jumps on the Digital Ethics bandwagon and calls governments to action to consider ethics in the development and deployment of AI.

"Gaining societal consensus on the ethics of AI is one of the key tasks of the government. Yet, to date, even the experts can't get close to agreeing on a basic ethical model, and Musk, for one, appears to have little genuine faith in the government to lead by example."



Digital Ethics is about investing in the future of Humanity

Organizations

Australian consultation on AI governance and leadership

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The Australian Human Rights Commission is calling for submissions responding to the questions in the [White Paper on Artificial Intelligence: Governance and Leadership](#).

The deadline for receiving comments and submissions is 18 March, 2019.

Reports/Whitepapers

The State of AI 2019: Divergence

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MMC Ventures, a research-led venture capital firm, together with Barclays UK Ventures just published ["The State of AI Divergence"](#), an extensive 150+ page report on the investment opportunities and risks in the current AI landscape.

"If we fail to make ethical and inclusive AI, we risk losing gains made in civil rights and gender equity under the guise of machine neutrality, and.... GANs (Generative Adversarial Networks) also present profound ethical and societal risks."

Denmark has 9 recommendations for Data Ethics

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The Danish Expert Group on Data Ethics presented its recommendations on how to make the best responsible use of data a competitive advantage for businesses.

"Our work on data ethics has been a sprint with nine concrete recommendations in which we today present the results. In the long run, the recommendations will contribute to the reflections on data ethics and the responsible use of data as both the culture and the competitive advantage are strengthened for Danish businesses towards the future."

Denmark releases Data Ethics recommendations

Disturbing things

The key hype part of the AI story: accuracy does not equal impact.

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Artificial intelligence will profoundly change the health care industry. But there are many more questions around how AI can best serve our public health needs.

"When it comes to evaluating AI, we should recognize that model accuracy is not the only measurement to consider. We have more questions to ask - and answer - about how AI can best operate both accurately and ethically so it properly augments medical professionals without adversely impacting overall public health"

Routine is about repeated accuracy, ethics about repeated benign impact

The Chinese government helped fund CRISPR babies experiment - who's next?

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The Chinese government indirectly provided funding that was used by a scientist to genetically edit babies using the CRISPR tool, according to documents obtained by Stat.

"China is receiving all the attention now, but another question is where else CRISPR babies might be born. The legal landscape is still uncertain, and there are clinics in Israel, Russia, and Spain that have lax policies on gene editing. There are so many candidates."

Snippet of the week

From falling in love with the Internet to resisting it.

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A wonderful essay in 16 parts about the breakup story with the Internet.

"Join the resistance knowing that you can't be certain whether you're building Skynet or destroying it."

Meme of the week

Does AI Ethics Have A Bad Name? (asks Calum Chase)

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In this Forbes article, [Calum Chase](#) asks whether the AI ethics community have chosen the wrong name for their field:

The issues explored in the field of AI ethics are important but it would help to clarify them if some of the heat was taken out of the discussion. It might help if instead of talking about AI ethics, we talked about beneficial AI and AI safety.

Peter and I also believe that the term "Digital Ethics" may feel a bit 'heavy', but we suggest to expand the agenda instead of reducing it. Preserving humanity is the bigger conversation.

Podcasts

New podcasts on chapter-6 of Gerd's book "Technology vs Humanity": from Magic to Manic to Toxic

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We recorded yet another podcast this week on Chapter-6 of Gerd's book ["Technology vs Humanity": from Magic to Manic to Toxic](#). We covered topics such as the emotional and intellectual manipulation by algorithmic systems that lead to a new kind of dehumanisation.

Subscribe to Gerd's podcasts on [Spotify](#), [iTunes](#) or [Soundcloud](#)

Gerd's Latest

Audio version of Gerd's keynote in Dubai

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[Here](#) is the audio version of Gerd's recent talk at the Emirates Litfest 2019 on 2 March 2019 in Dubai.

"How do we embrace technology without becoming it? What moral values are you prepared to stand up for - before being human alters its meaning forever?"

Smiley

Zuck testing new voice synth software in European Parliament

End note

That's it for this week. We'll be back next Tuesday with the ninth edition of our newsletter.

The [Digital Ethics \(DE\)](#) newsletter is provided at no cost. If you are reading it and value it, we wouldn't mind if you gave my digest some love through [Twitter](#) -> or just forward it to a friend.

We are always interested in your opinion, so please feel free to [ping us anytime](#) with comments or feedback.

Live long and prosper!

[Gerd](#) and [Peter Van](#)

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